

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SY-05 AID-05 SS-15 NSC-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01

SP-02 /067 W

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R 231308Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4844

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, LT

SUBJ: POISONING AT KING'S COUNTRY PALACE

REF: MASERU A-23

1. THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN REPORTED BY AIRGRAM. BECAUSE DISTORTED RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE AND HAVE BEEN GIVEN WIDE DISTRIBUTION BY SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, THIS TELEGRAPHIC REPORT IS ALSO SUBMITTED.

2. SUMMARY. ACCIDENTAL POISONING AT KING MOSHOESHOE'S COUNTRY PALACE A MONTH AGO HAS GIVEN RISE TO RUMOR OF ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST HIS MAJESTY. VICTIMS WERE NINE LOW-LEVEL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, FIVE OF WHOM DIED, WHO DRANK INSECTICIDE FROM SHERRY BOTTLE. ROYAL FAMILY DID NOT DRINK FROM BOTTLE, BUT RUMORS ASSERT POISON WAS INTENDED FOR THEM. NO EVIDENCE IS AVAILABLE TO INDICATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCIDENT WAS ANYTHING OTHER THAN ACCIDENT.

3. MOST RELIABLE VERSION OF INCIDENT IS THAT NINE WORKMEN FROM MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE DELIVERED CHICKEN FEED TO MATSIENG PALACE WHICH IS WORKING FARM. WORKMEN ASKED FOR SOMETHING TO DRINK AND WERE PROVIDED BOTTLE OF WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SHERRY AND WHICH WAS MIXED INTO A PUNCH. BOTTLE ACTUALLY CONTAINED POWERFUL INSECTICIDE. NINE WORKMEN WHO DRANK PUNCH BECAME DESPERATELY ILL, WERE TAKEN TO NEAREST HOSPITAL, AND FIVE DIED.

4. SINCE MATSIENG IS WORKING FARM, ACCOUNT OF INSECTICIDE BEING STORED IN SHERRY BOTTLE IS CREDIBLE. IN LESOTHO, USED BOTTLES ARE A COMMODITY AND SUCH THINGS AS INSECTICIDES , TURPENTINE, KEROSENE, ETC. ARE COMMONLY DISPENSED IN USED LIQUOR AND WINE BOTTLES WITH THEIR ORIGINAL LABELS STILL INTACT.

5. ARGUING AGAINST THE ACCIDENT THEORY ARE REPORTS, NONE OF WHICH CONFIRMED, THAT BOTTLE OF SHERRY IN QUESTION CAME FROM PALACE IN MASERU, THAT IT WAS SEALED, AND THAT IT WAS TAKEN FROM FULL CASE OF SHERRY IN PALACE PANTRY.

6. ONE RUMOR HAS IT THAT KING DEPARTED LESOTHO TO RESUME STUDIES AT OXFORD TO TAKE HIM OUT OF HARM'S WAY. THIS RUMOR DEFINITELY NOT TRUE AS KING HAD MADE TRAVEL PLANS BEFORE POISONING OCCURRED.

7. POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING INCIDENT. EMBASSY'S ONE POLICE SOURCE, WHO NOT INVOLVED IN INVESTIGATION, ADVISES NOTHING HAS COME TO HIS ATTENTION TO SUGGEST SKULLDUGGERY. NO ONE HAS SUGGESTED WHO WOULD HAVE AN INTEREST IN KILLING THE KING. UNTIL MORE EVIDENCE IS AVAILABLE, EMBASSY MUST CONCLUDE INCIDENT WAS ACCIDENT. HAUGHT

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